Standards for
TEACH Rwanda Project &
Exemplary Schools
International Best Practices, Learning Settings, &
Materials That Promote Young Children’s
Integrated Learning Through Guided Play

Project School Standards

I. Teaching Practices Requirements
   A. Teacher Education
      1. Teachers are functionally proficient in English (speaking, reading, and
         writing) and agree to increase their language skills.
      2. Head teacher (and other teachers as possible) observes children and
         teachers, supervised by a TEACH Rwanda representative, for at least one
         full day in a TEACH Rwanda Exemplary School.
      3. Head teacher engages in at least 35 hours of professional development
         sponsored by TEACH Rwanda. A stamped certificate of completion will be
         provided.
      4. Teachers agree to continue their education in international best practices
         through formal university study, participation in educational organizations,
         and professional development opportunities offered through TEACH Rwanda.
   B. Enrollment
      1. Enrollment is limited to 20 children per classroom with at least 2 qualified
         teachers for preprimary classrooms, and 22 children for primary classrooms
         with 1 qualified teacher.
      2. Preprimary enrollment is limited to children ages 3 through 6. Primary
         enrollment begins at age 6.
      3. Enrollment is open to all children in the community, including those with
         special needs and from vulnerable families.
   C. Curriculum Planning
      1. Head teacher works with staff to prepare learning plans using TEACH
         Rwanda Weekly Learning Plan forms and other TEACH Rwanda curriculum
         resources. Learning plans are submitted for review to TEACH Rwanda
         experts by e-mail at least 2 weeks in advance. Suggestions for improvement
         are incorporated into learning plans.
      2. The curriculum focuses on a Rwanda-relevant, meaningful, integrated
         engaging theme based on children’s and teachers’ interests that is explored
         in depth with children for at least one week. Learning plans address all
         required areas of the Rwandan competency-based curriculum.
3. Daily learning plans reflect an enriched Rwandan curriculum that addresses three key areas through play
   a. Construction & Creativity (math, social studies, free play, art/traditional crafts, music, Rwandan culture, journals),
   b. Investigation Outdoors (science/Rwandan environment, active play, nature), and
   c. Literacy & Imagination (children's names, storytelling, books, poems, journals, writing, pretend play, experience stories, in Kinyarwand and English)

D. Teacher/Child Interactions That Support Integrated Learning and Analytical Thinking
1. International best practices are implemented within a warm, loving Rwandan cultural context. Small group and individual explorations are encouraged. Rote learning/memorization is not an effective teaching method.
2. All teacher/child interactions
   a. support positive social skills and feelings with kind, gentle, consistent, affectionate guidance;
   b. encourage individualized, hands-on learning through children's play, curiosity, and creativity; and
   c. nurture each child's development (mental, physical/sensory, social, emotional, cognitive/language/literacy).

II. Learning Environment Essentials
A. Building Requirements
1. Building meets and/or exceeds all Rwandan requirements.

B. Classroom Furnishings
1. Classroom furniture made by local carpenters:
   a. Book display shelf placed in quiet area for reading, writing, dramatic play, puppets, and storytelling.
   b. At least two low, open shelves to display learning materials.
   c. At least two low, washable tables for children to write, draw, bead, do puzzles, and explore learning materials.
   d. At least four benches and/or chairs for children and teachers to sit at tables.
2. Carpet/mat for children to sit on the floor.

C. Learning Materials Required
1. Rwandan drums, shakers, and other local musical instruments
2. Selection of natural, beautiful, native, and international materials: leaves, shells, rocks, plants, animals
3. Picture of Rwandan President, map of Rwanda, Rwandan flag
4. Variety of open-ended art media for writing and creative expression: markers, paper, scissors, beads, chalk, clay (no coloring books)
5. Collection of high-quality children's picture books in Kinyarwanda and English
6. Selection of Rwandan-made dolls (banana fiber, sisal, fabric) and other pretend play items such as recycled hats, scarves, purses, shoes/boots, stuffed animals, puppets, cooking tools
7. Assortment of blocks: wooden unit blocks, table blocks, and/or plastic interlocking blocks
8. Selection of sturdy jigsaw puzzles and matching games, preferably made from recycled materials by local crafters or teachers
9. Several sturdy balls (banana fiber or recycled material), sidewalk chalk, other outdoor play equipment
10. Soft sand and clean water play basins and tools: unbreakable containers, buckets, sieves, pipes, recycled items such as tires

All TEACH Rwanda Project Schools understand, and are expected to demonstrate continuous progress toward, meeting TEACH Rwanda Exemplary School standards. Project Schools will develop a continuous improvement plan intended to achieve Exemplary School status, and self-sufficiency, within 3 years.

Exemplary School Standards

I. Teaching Practices Requirements
   A. Teacher Education
      1. Teachers are functionally proficient in English (speaking, reading, and writing) and agree to increase their language skills. Primary teachers also are fluent in French.
      2. Head teacher (and other teachers as possible) observes children and teachers, supervised by a TEACH Rwanda representative, for at least one full day in a TEACH Rwanda Demonstration School.
      3. Head teacher (and others as possible) engage in at least 35 hours of professional development sponsored by TEACH Rwanda. A stamped certificate of completion will be provided.
      4. Teachers agree to continue their education in international best practices through formal university study, participation in educational organizations, and professional development opportunities offered through TEACHRwanda.org.
   B. Enrollment
      1. Enrollment is limited to 20 children per classroom with at least 2 qualified teachers for preprimary classrooms, and 22 children with 1 well-prepared teacher for primary classrooms.
      2. Preprimary enrollment is limited to children ages 3 through 6. Primary enrollment begins at age 6.
3. Enrollment is open to all children in the community, including those with special needs and from vulnerable families.

C. Curriculum Planning

1. Head teacher works with staff to prepare learning plans using TEACH Rwanda Weekly Learning Plan forms and other TEACH Rwanda curriculum resources. Learning plans are submitted for review to TEACH Rwanda experts by e-mail at least 2 weeks in advance. Suggestions for improvement are incorporated into learning plans.

2. The curriculum focuses on a Rwanda-relevant, meaningful, integrated, engaging theme based on children’s and teachers’ interests that is explored in depth with children for at least one week. Learning plans address all required areas of the Rwandan competency-based curriculum. Analytical thinking, creativity, and literacy are featured.

3. Daily learning plans reflect an enriched Rwandan curriculum that addresses three key areas through play
   a. Construction & Creativity (math, social studies, free play, art/traditional crafts, music, Rwandan culture, journals),
   b. Investigation Outdoors (science/Rwandan environment, active play, nature), and
   c. Literacy & Imagination (children’s names, storytelling, books, poems, journals, writing, pretend play, experience stories, in Kinyarwanda and English)

4. Key components of weekly plans
   a. DAILY: together, read one children’s book/tell a story with props (in English and Kinyarwanda)
   b. DAILY: children explore Rwandan art/crafts/music/traditions
   c. DAILY: children write and draw
   d. DAILY: support children’s social/emotional/brain development: increasing independence, critical thinking, self-control, problem solving
   e. AT LEAST TWICE WEEKLY: children explore sand/water/mud/clay
   f. AT LEAST TWICE WEEKLY: children engage in other outdoor investigations such as tending plants, caring for animals, observing weather, and exploring natural, open-ended materials
   g. AT LEAST TWICE WEEKLY: children engage in large-motor, active outdoor play

5. Daily class schedules for preschool include about
   a. 1 hour for large-group, teacher-directed activities and routines (planning time, snack, story time, group games, review)
   b. 2 hours for individual and small-group learning through child-initiated and teacher-supported free play

6. Daily class schedules for primary include two 3-hour sessions of integrated learning, indoors and outdoors.

7. Weekly learning plans are available for families, community residents, and TEACH Rwanda staff to review.
D. Daily Routines

1. Teachers briefly plan with the group of children to start each day. At least two learning activities linked to the theme are featured each day.
2. At the end of each day, and each week, teachers ask children to review highlights of what they learned (KWL charts, journal entries, children's writing and art). Based on children's feedback and teacher observations, teachers identify how their learning objectives for children are being met and revise plans accordingly.
3. Healthy snacks (fruit, vegetables, enriched porridge, bread, eggs) are provided at times suitable for children.
4. Children use the bathroom as needed.
5. Hands are washed with soap and running water before entering the classroom, before eating, and after using the toilet.
6. Every day, teachers reflect on the effectiveness of their teaching strategies and interactions. They share how they facilitated children's engaging learning experiences, describe children's feedback about the day, and analyze their classroom practices so they can continue to improve learning through play.

E. Teacher/Child Interactions That Support Integrated Learning and Analytical Thinking

1. International best practices (as outlined here) are implemented within a warm, loving Rwandan cultural context. Small group and individual explorations are encouraged. Rote learning/memorization is not an effective teaching method.
2. All teacher/child interactions
   a. support positive social skills and feelings with kind, gentle, consistent, affectionate guidance;
   b. encourage individualized, hands-on learning through children's play, curiosity, and creativity; and
   c. nurture each child's development (mental, physical/sensory, social, emotional, cognitive/language/literacy).
3. Expect children to think and reason for themselves, wonder and ask questions, make logical choices, be responsible for themselves (such as pouring their own porridge), and care for and about others. Encourage children to learn from their successes and mistakes, and to try tasks again or in another way until they succeed.
4. Teachers interact in calm, friendly ways with individuals and children in small groups as they learn independently. Teachers guide children to find solutions to their own disagreements and to become increasingly self-disciplined.
5. Teachers set up and facilitate learning experiences for children to explore materials using all five senses when possible. Teachers recognize that children learn in many different ways and have varied interests and skills.
6. Teachers support children's learning by observing their play, briefly describing children's efforts and the learning process ("You are looking at both sides of the leaf"), asking children to explain ("Tell me about..."), and talking about the materials and tools ("What do you think would happen if...?").

7. Teachers choose a variety of children's literature—fiction and nonfiction—to develop early literacy skills such as an understanding of story, plot, and characters; empathy for others and appreciation of human and cultural diversity, and knowledge about the world around them.

8. Teachers focus on the PROCESS through which children learn. Children are encouraged to figure things out, solve problems, and do things for themselves. Children are urged to represent what they know with art materials, pretend play props, and construction with blocks.

II. Children's Progress Records
1. Teachers observe children daily. Teachers write notes at least twice a month to document how each child represents his/her learning and to record each child's strengths and areas that need additional support.
2. Teachers use tools such as children's dictation of original stories, KWL charts, comparison charts, and graphs to record children's learning and understanding.
3. Individual, confidential records are kept (observation records, work samples, photos) to document each child's learning.
4. At the end of each term, a brief TEACH Rwanda progress report in Kinyarwanda is given to each family.
5. Individual progress report results from each term are recorded on a spreadsheet for research purposes. Results are reviewed and analyzed at the end of each term.
6. Teachers analyze their observations of children to identify children with special developmental needs. For each child with special needs, teachers will work with families to develop a plan to address individual goals for their children.

III. Family Involvement Group
1. Families of children enrolled in the school meet at least once a term. Teachers and families discuss school-related topics, how families can be involved in children's learning, and share practical ideas to promote children's development at home and school.
2. Families take leadership roles with regard to decisions such as school uniforms.
3. Families sign a contract at the time of their child's enrollment in which they agree to pay an enrollment fee, to pay school fees before each term starts, to see that their child arrives and leaves on time, to notify the
school of any important medical conditions, and to give the school contact information in case of emergency.

IV. Learning Environment Essentials

A. Building Requirements

1. Building meets and/or exceeds all Rwandan requirements.
2. Classrooms contain at least 3 square meters per child. Preferred size is 5 sq meters per child.
3. Electricity is available in all rooms, with a ceiling light and wall sockets.
4. Building has a kitchen with running water at a sink and an energy-efficient method for boiling water, such as gas burners. Kitchen includes secure storage shelves and containers for food.
5. Facility has 2 child-size toilets (separate for girls and boys) and 2 handwashing sinks for every group of children enrolled. Adult bathrooms have at least two seated flushable toilets (one each for men and women) and a sink with running water.
6. Fresh drinking water is readily available for children and staff. Convenient source of clean water is available for water play and handwashing.
7. Building layout includes a school office with wireless Internet service capability, library/meeting room, and sufficient storage for learning materials and children's records.
8. A large, safe, enclosed outdoor play area including shaded areas, natural spaces with rocks and hillsides on which to climb, area suitable for a kitchen garden, water play basins and recycled learning materials, large containers such as recycled tires for sand play, grassy area for games, and running water.
9. Building has a gate, fence, or other security measures as needed to lock all access to the facility.
10. All features of the building are in good condition: unobstructed entrances and exits, plastered and painted walls, and safe electrical wiring. Rooms are naturally well-lit with glass in lockable windows that can be opened for ventilation. Doors can be locked.
11. Structure is built to high standards of construction. Divisions between rooms are solid walls and ceilings to contain sound.

B. Classroom Furnishings

3. Classroom furniture made by local carpenters:
   d. Book display shelf placed in quiet area for reading, writing, dramatic play, puppets, and storytelling.
   e. At least two low, open shelves to display learning materials.
   f. At least two low, washable tables for children to write, draw, bead, do puzzles, and explore learning materials.
   g. At least four benches and/or chairs for children and teachers to sit at tables.
4. Carpet/mat for children to sit on the floor.
5. Rwandan baskets and trays in which to organize and display learning materials.

C. Learning Materials Required
1. Rwandan drums, shakers, and other local musical instruments
2. Selection of natural, beautiful, native, and international materials: leaves, shells, rocks, plants, animals
3. Rwandan art used and displayed for inspiration: wood and clay sculpture, textiles, wood carvings, dung art, baskets, jewelry, mats, musical instruments, toys
4. Picture of Rwandan President, map of Rwanda, Rwandan flag
5. Variety of open-ended art media for writing and creative expression: markers, paper, scissors, beads, chalk, clay (no coloring books)
6. Collection of high-quality children's picture books in Kinyarwanda and English
7. Selection of Rwandan-made dolls (banana fiber, sisal, fabric) and other pretend play items such as recycled hats, scarves, purses, shoes/boots, stuffed animals, puppets, cooking tools
8. Assortment of blocks: wooden unit blocks, table blocks, and/or plastic interlocking blocks
9. Variety of toy vehicles, preferably wood and made by local crafters: cars, trucks, boats, trains, buses
10. Assortment of small, pretend animals and people, made by local crafters if possible
11. Selection of sturdy jigsaw puzzles and matching games, preferably made from recycled materials by local crafters or teachers
12. Several sturdy balls (banana fiber or recycled material), sidewalk chalk, other outdoor play equipment
13. Science and math exploration materials: magnifying glasses, measuring tools, wood scraps, plant materials, stones and soil, animals to care for/observe, recycled materials preferred
14. Soft sand and clean water play basins and tools: unbreakable containers, buckets, sieves, pipes, recycled items such as tires

D. Roles of Exemplary Schools as Centers of Excellence for Professional Development
A. Exemplary School
1. Host and guide ECE observers—including teachers, administrators, TTC, TVET, and university students—who engage in TEACH Rwanda Level 1 Modules for Introductory Classroom Observations
2. Host and guide visitors—government officials, families, international representatives, and others—to observe a high-quality learning environment and best practices

B. Professional Development
1. Orient all visitors to TEACH Rwanda's philosophy
2. Administer TEACH Rwanda pre- and post-surveys to all Level 1 Module visitors
3. Facilitate a reflection after each visit on the observers’ experiences, either informally or as part of the Level 1 Module
4. Work with TEACH Rwanda to supervise and coach teachers to serve as role models and mentors to TTC and university-student interns placed in their classrooms
5. Provide space and materials for TEACH Rwanda to conduct Level 2 Modules to Implement Best Practices

C. Community Leadership
1. Work with TEACH Rwanda representatives to develop sensitivity within the community and country about the importance of early childhood education and positive parenting skills
2. Advocate for higher quality early childhood education in Rwanda
3. Offer holiday programs for the community, families, and children such as story times, support groups, and other enrichment opportunities

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